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A NEVER-ENDING JOURNEY FOR HIGHER EDUCATION FACULTY: LEARNING TO TEACH ONLINE

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Faculty members in the Department of Curriculum and Instructional Technology at Valdosta State University in the southern U.S. state of Georgia have been involved in distance education for many years, and full online course delivery since 1998. We have evidence that our programs and courses have resulted in e-learning for our students. However, we are equally sure that, as faculty, we will *never* arrive at the destination of knowing everything we need to know about online design, development, utilization, management and evaluation. Lifelong and constant learning is truly necessary for success and survival as an online instructor.

How does an individual faculty member continue to improve his or her skill in teaching online? While professional development training is sometimes available, it generally cannot address the specific needs of a faculty member at the specific time of need. Self-study is a more common approach, supporting and reinforcing the additional duties of a faculty member is doing and presenting research. This lecture will present a sampler of the research and professional development topics that have been my focus over the past several years. Viewed together, these topics demonstrate how professional development needs and faculty research interests go hand in hand over time. The topics have been driven by my need to know and do in order to teach effectively and efficiently at a distance.

This sampling approach seems appropriate as a way of introducing my work to international peers. Sampling has multiple definitions that provide useful metaphors for this lecture. Sampling, in music, is the act of taking a portion of one sound recording and reusing it as an instrument in a new recording. Likewise, this lecture will create something original for a new audience based on past work. Sampling, in statistics, is the act of selecting items at random from a population to test hypotheses about the population. While the selection of topics for this lecture will not be at random, the audience will be able to judge the premise of lifelong learning as a necessity for higher education faculty engaged in e-learning design, development and delivery. And sampling may even be of a pleasurable nature, as in the practice of a connoisseur of wines. Sampling multiple wines allows one to judge the quality of each vintage, as well as the overall output of the vineyard. I hope that this lecture will be interesting and satisfying for the audience.

Before e-learning came on the scene, I was involved in distance delivery through two-way interactive video. The issues of technical support, instructional design and communication/culture drove much of my research. As video classes became Web-enhanced, and then gave way to purely online delivery, these same issues continued to be the main areas for development. In addition to designing and delivering my own courses, I became involved in team efforts to design an entire graduate program online, and to train faculty in other departments. Questions were raised about appropriate levels of technology competency among college faculty and, by extension, among students as well. As the Curriculum and Instructional Technology department went increasingly beyond most others in the College of Education or the broader University, it was a challenge to learn how to provide a broad spectrum of instructional and technical support for both students and faculty. As an entire research-based advanced degree program was brought totally online it became necessary to "teach" research and "teach" writing online. This necessitated ever more familiarity with search and evaluation techniques for online resources as well as the use of innovative feedback techniques such as the use of graphics tablets to mark papers. A primary and continuing challenge is to investigate and improve communication, understand online culture, and to foster and support cooperation and collaboration among students.

First Few Miles: Evolution from Interactive Video to Online

Teaching using interactive video was quite appealing to me (with my having been in commercial television in an earlier career). It brought together the functions of acting as writer, producer, technical director and performer, simultaneously with the professorial functions of conveying content, guiding learning and assessing student performance. I often simultaneously taught three or four classrooms at distant sites, along with a group of "live" students who were in the classroom with me. The juggling of duties, perspectives and roles was quite challenging, a harbinger of what was to come with online teaching. During this time my research and professional development focused on the means for doing formative evaluations during distance classes in order to respond with needed changes quickly. I adapted the classroom assessment techniques (Angelo & Cross, 1993) for use in the interactive video classroom. Study of copyright and fair use guidelines for multimedia was also important to me during this time, as I tried to incorporate varied media such as commercially produced video into my classes. Since the video was distributed over telecommunication systems, there were variously interpreted rules about the legality of inclusion of copyrighted materials. One of the most important and interesting projects I worked on during this time was an attempt to use a connoisseurship model to evaluate the likelihood of success of any distance education program. Since the experience of teaching in an interactive video classroom seemed much like putting on a theatrical production, it seemed an appropriate model to use dramaturgical criticism as the method of evaluation.

Teaching the "how to" of practical multimedia development was naturally of interest to me during this time. Doesn't it seem impossible that PowerPoint was once

new? But even in those early years, I tried to encourage my students and colleagues to look beyond the "electronic blackboard" function. I worked on professional development modules that showed teachers how to create interactive learning centers and to implement them over the interactive video network. Now PowerPoint has become a multi-faceted program that allows many creative applications, including within e-learning—too bad most people are still using it to illustrate their lectures with words!

Faculty and staff development has been both an interest and a responsibility of the members of our department throughout the time I've been involved with distance learning. In order to model excellent technology use in online learning, I have to work hard to keep pace with my technologically sophisticated colleagues. We have kept ahead of most others in our College of Education, and are asked to both teach and promote technology use in teacher education. Issues of designing and developing staff development for distance delivery occupied my research agenda for a time, especially focusing upon the means of evaluating the quality of the sessions and programs, both in formative and summative modes.

The Main Journey: The "Soft" Technologies

University-wide curriculum changes gave the Instructional Technology program an opportunity to define I.T. in a way that was inclusive of our focus on learning, rather than concentrating only on hardware and software. We adopted the Association for Educational Communications and Technology (AECT) definition as the conceptual basis for our programs, courses, performance standards and assessments. "Instructional technology is the theory and research of the design, development, utilization, management and evaluation of the processes and resources for learning" (Seels & Richey, 1994). We instituted the electronic portfolio as the capstone experience for our Master's level students, requiring that they demonstrate their competencies in the domains of design, development, utilization, management and evaluation through the artifacts in their portfolios. We chose Portable Document Format (pdf) as the standard for the construction of the portfolios and have, in the years since, seen the portfolios steadily improve in quality and technical sophistication. During this time I have done many papers on electronic portfolios, both in concept and in technical production.

Another curriculum change was the impetus for the biggest change in our department in relation to e-learning. As a team, faculty members in my department created a new, totally online program; the first of its kind at our University or in the State. The design of this program is described in a publication co-authored by the development team (Recesso, et. al, 2001). The Education Specialist degree (Ed.S.) has as a prerequisite a master's degree (in any related field) but is not intended as a step to a doctoral degree. Because of this advanced level of study, we had few eligible students in our rural region. However, the situation changed when we re-created the program online, as we were able to attract students from a broad geographic region. Design, development, management and evaluation of this popular program has been both a source of energy and a drain upon it ever since.

Since our department was successful in the re-design of programs for online delivery, other departments and units in the University called upon us to share our expertise. However, as you all know, not all faculty members share your enthusiasm for technological learning solutions. Several research and development projects resulted from this time period. I looked at both student and instructor readiness for online learning. Through an examination of many college and university websites, I found that many were using some sort of self-assessment instrument, especially for the students, to determine whether they would be good candidates for success in online courses. These surveys generally included self-assessment of technology skills and access, learning style factors (such as self-regulation), time management, independence, and an educational philosophy belief dealing with how people learn and the roles of teachers and students. I compared and contrasted many of these instruments, and corresponded with distance learning coordinators about their use. In no case did the organizations follow-up on these initial self-assessments with an evaluation of persons' eventual success or failure in distance learning. It became clear that the function of the initial self-assessments was promotional in nature. It did not inform the admission process or student decision-making (Zahner, 2000).

Instructor readiness and motivation is another matter. Some college faculty have not embraced the use of technology in their daily work at any level, so online teaching is far beyond their level of technological competency (Zahner & Hasling, 2001). Information literacy is a related skill that is also lacking among college faculty. Frier, Musgrove and Zahner (2001) conducted a needs assessment with junior college faculty and found that there was a considerable gap between the current status and the skills faculty would need to begin to teach online even at a rudimentary level. However, other studies have found college faculty members to be prepared in most of the International Society for Technology Education (ISTE) technology performance standards for teachers, although under-prepared in areas related to online instruction (Wilson, 2001).

The motivation for faculty to take on the enormous effort of teaching must be addressed according to multiple factors. Faculty may or may not have a choice for participating in online teaching. Institutional issues such as salary, promotion and tenure, workload, training are often discussed in the literature (Bower, 2001). Faculty members express concerns about a lessening of teacher-student interaction and opportunities for peer learning. Quality issues are in question, although are less of a concern for those experienced in teaching online.

There has been much work done in the U.S. in the area of faculty attitudes, needs and concerns in relation to distance learning as well as an examination of institutional support mechanisms. In the U.S., the Institute for Higher Education Policy (2003) has identified important faculty support benchmarks that institutions must meet. These included technical assistance in course development, transitional support from traditional to distance delivery, peer mentoring, ongoing training and written guidance for faculty to resolve student use problems. But, interestingly, they also found that while faculty members identified monetary and workload incentives and institutional rewards as important motivators for involvement, these elements were not essential. Good online teaching and learning were taking place at institu-

tions regardless of the presence of these extrinsic rewards. Instead, they found that faculty engaged in online teaching already knew they were good teachers, and participated because they were excited about the practice, and found online teaching intrinsically rewarding.

Studies conducted at the State University of West Georgia, an institution similar in size and mission to Valdosta State University, looked at faculty backgrounds, concerns and online teaching practices (McKenzie et. al, 2000). The researchers identified several factors motivating faculty to participate. The top reasons included the desire to get students involved with technology, to use technology more innovatively, dedication to students' best interests, flexibility in working hours and location, the chance to interact with students more frequently, and pressure from college administration. These studies found that people who have taught online are more intrinsically motivated; while those who haven't cite as necessary extrinsic motivators issues such as monetary support, workload reduction, opportunities for training and credit toward promotion/tenure. All worried about decreased student interaction, a lack of time to develop a course, reduced course quality, and time away from research and publishing. Those faculty who had taught online worried about increased class sizes; while those who hadn't expressed a preference for traditional setting.

Similar findings were reported from a large university in the Midwest of the United States. Incentives were providing innovative instruction and new teaching techniques, self-gratification, and assistance to place-bound students. Release time and peer recognition were important, though less so. Obstacles were time, support, time taken from research, training requirements and one's developing effective technology skills (Rockwell, et. al, 1999). A recent meta-analysis of over 100 studies concerning distance faculty motivation and incentives has established the consistency of factors across time, types of institution and geography (Parker, 2003).

It is interesting for those of us who do teach online to examine our motivations in light of a few of the motivational factors outlined in the literature. I invite you to join me in this reflection…

- Do I have a choice as regards teaching online? *No, not really. Our programs require this practice, and since I'm on the team that designed them, I live with the consequences.*
- Am I technologically competent? *Never enough. I count on my peers, my students and self-study for the impetus and the assistance to improve.*
- Am I prepared in the pedagogy of online instruction? *I think so. I have the advantage of preparation in the discipline of instructional systems design, concerning skills that are generalizable to any content area. I also have the advantage of teaching technology, so that the medium and the method are quite compatible.*
- If I were not prepared in the pedagogy of online instruction, where would I gain these skills? *That, I believe, is a very difficult obstacle for most college faculty.*
- Are issues of salary, promotion and tenure in relation to online teaching a problem? *Personally, no, but I believe these are constraints for others.*

- Is workload an issue? *Yes. In my experience an online class takes much more time in both preparation and maintenance than does a traditional class, and, in my opinion, should be smaller than a traditional class, not larger.*
- Do I worry about the quality of online classes? *Locally, no. More globally, yes. It is obvious that there is a vast range of quality and some difficulty in applying evaluation models in a meaningful way. The same problems apply to traditional instruction as well.*
- Am I short-changing students in student-teacher interactions or peer learning opportunities? *Absolutely not! I find a huge increase in both in online classes. Each student has many interactions with me and with peers.*
- Do I miss my role of expert teacher? *No. I'm very happy to be a facilitator. I may miss being "on stage" occasionally, but am glad to participate in a more learner-focused environment.*
- Do I like the flexibility allowed? *Yes! I am teaching two classes even as we speak here today.*
- Do I find that time is taken from research and reading in my field? *Again, I am lucky to be in the Instructional Technology field and so online teaching and learning can* ***be*** *my research. However, I must admit that I have vast quantities of qualitative data gathered in my classes that are hiding in file folders on my computer.*
- Do I like teaching online? *Yes, I love it.*
- Could I "sell" the practice to others? *I try!*

(Not) the End of the Road: Knowledge Management

There really is no going back on this road to e-learning. With the increase in numbers of our students who have high speed Internet access, I am looking forward to the opportunity to "jazz up" my courses with more audio and video. I am a dedicated digital moviemaker, and find that the teaching strategies available to me in the interactive video era are returning, new and improved, in online courses. Students' technological sophistication is increasing, and with that, there is a need to challenge them with assignments that require meaningful use of such advanced skills. There's more to know, more to choose from, and more to keep up with. What's a professor to do? One idea I have explored (in a published article) is that of knowledge management for professional development – that is, giving the idea of an ongoing personal webpage in which I organize the tools and resources I need to do my work (Zahner, 2002). Now…if I could just find the time to update and maintain it!

For faculty members, particularly those in institutions that do not provide a great deal of technical support, the learning journey is complex and never-ending. Increasing the effectiveness of online teaching, resulting in e-learning, seems achievable through experience, quality instructional design and formative evaluation. From my point of view, the real challenge is to try to find ways of making online teaching more efficient—a much more difficult task. If, however, online teaching cannot be done well without the huge exertion of time and energy now common, it is likely

that college faculty currently teaching online will "burn out" and those who have not yet embraced the technology will continue to resist.

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